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ABSTRACT

This paper describes an elective course at Taiwan's Wen Tzao Ursuline College of Modern Languages, "Concise English Poetry Appreciation and Recitation." The course is based on the reader response approach and targets third year students, leading them into the world of poetry through various stages (traditional nursery rhymes and simple, humorous, and interesting poems). The course highlights poetic structures and topics and uses poetry sharing through student projects and interclass performances. Class activities include creative self-introduction, haiku, a Mother Goose game, and an instant poetry show. Interclass activities include video viewing (e.g., "The Dead Poets Society" and "The Postman"), group sharing and poetry reading, and a poetry contest. Multimedia applications are used to enhance learning. Recommendations for the future include developing a discussion area in which learners can practice writing poems or express their perceptions of a poem; surveying students about their favorite poem of the month; creating a homework area; and promoting portfolios. (SM)

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Readers Response Approach to English Poetry Teaching

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Abstract

What are lovers of poetry made of? Passion, observant mind, emotion, motivation, curiosity, imagination, creativeness, and willingness. Lovers of poetry are made through cautious nurturing and thoughtful planning. In Wen Tzao Ursuline College of Modern Languages an elective course entitled "Concise English Poetry Appreciation and Recitation" is designed based on readers response approach for the third year students who are led to the world of poetry through stages of traditional nursery rhymes, simple, humorous, and interesting poems underlining poetic structures and topics, and poetry sharing which includes projects and interclass performances. What's more, integration of multimedia brightens both learners and the instructors with a sense of achievement and offers asynchronous learning.

This workshop introduces the course design, the teacher-learners interaction at different stages, and the application of multimedia to the course. Samples of students work in reading aloud, performances of poetry sharing, poetry projects, and the teacher's "English Poetry" page will be displayed.

INTRODUCTION

In Wen Tzao Ursuline College of Modern Languages "Concise English Poetry Appreciation and Recitation" (簡易英詩賞析與朗誦) which started in the academic year of 1997, is an elective course for the third year students. Bassnett and Grundy (1993) mentioned that students especially beginners should be provided with the pleasure of making and exploring aesthetically satisfying patterns when learning poetry. The most desirable goal of this course is to open a door of poetry to students who can experience poetry with their hearts to feel what it is and express their understanding with the best means. The workshop focuses on how readers response approach is integrated in the course, i.e. putting learners in different stages of learning and making them become active participants in the classroom and outside the

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classroom. In this workshop, the course design, the activities done in different stages, multimedia application, and teacher-made web site will be discussed and shown.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Since readers response approach was the main spirit of the course, learners' voices should be heard. Learners were expected to take joy in the words, find their own voice and pleasure in poetry from interaction and reading it aloud. (Rubin, 1993) Walt Whitman called poetry "the barbaric yawp" in which readers were able to express their emotion and ideas through reading and sharing. Benton and Fox (1985) addressed that poetry offers readers the aesthetic experience. Learners can make the meaning from their response to the sound, rhythm, and formal ordering of the language. Indeed sounds, rhythm, pictures, story, and feelings are the elements that help readers experience every poem they encounter.

COURSE DESIGN

Concise English Poetry Appreciation and Recitation is a two-credit elective course for third year students in Wen Tzao College of Modern Languages. The teaching goals for the course are: 1) to enlighten high-school level students' "inner eyes and ears" of appreciating English poetry; 2) to introduce basic poetic terms through examples of concise poems; 3) to enable learners to analyze examples of poems and express readers' responses; and 4) to reinforce students' pronunciation. Topics involved in the course are in relation to nature, animals, people, objects, emotions, friendship, love, life, war, and so on.

The grading system consists of general work (50%), midterm (25%) and final exam (25%). Oral and written tests were the two components in both the midterm and final exams. In oral tests, students were asked to memorize the lines of both the assigned poem by teachers and the poem chosen by themselves. Oral tests were held one week before the exam schedules, while the written tests were given on the scheduled dates.

Teaching plan for the course in the school year of 1997 was designed to cover one chapter in every two or three weeks. Sound and Sense (Arp, 1997) was the textbook used. However, the last two hours of the second semester did not go to Sound and Sense but Mother Goose: Jazz Chants instead. Teachers introduced famous English nursery rhymes and children's poems to students.

Other than enjoying their classmates' performance in class every time they met,

students also got the opportunity to share with each other their "unique creativity" when they had the "get-together" class in Kung Chien Hall. "Programs" included excellent performances from the oral test and impromptu ones as well. The film The Dead Poets Society was also viewed during one of the three get-together classes.

In the feed back of an informal survey, most of the students said that they liked the way teachers arranged the class, and no one complained about the evaluation of their school wok! Almost everybody considered "Mother Goose" the most interesting unit of the course and the textbook extremely difficult to understand. Some of them suggested that teachers help next year students write their own poems. More than half of them thought it helpful to see "poetry-related" films. A few students hoped that teachers could give more room for love poems and songs in the course. Some of them even wanted teachers to give assignment for winter and summer breaks. As for the performance, most students loved to go on the stage and recite/sing poems in front of everybody, while three of them "confessed" that it was the most terrifying in-class experience they ever had and hated it.

In the school year of 1998, teachers decided not to use Sound and Sense as the textbook, but to make their own handouts for this course since suitable textbooks for third year students in Wen Tzao were not available in the market. The introduction of special terms of poetry discussed in each chapter of Sound and Sense was still kept as an essential part of the handouts while the long, difficult, and abstruse poems collected in that book were replaced by either interesting children's poems or less complicated poems.

Teaching plan was also slightly changed. Class began with the introduction of English nursery rhymes and children's poems. Mother Goose: Jazz Chants was the assigned book for the first month. Poems about self-awareness, haiku, and holiday were also introduced. The get-together classes were increased to three times a semester and two hours for each time. They were movie seeing, students performance, and a two-hour DIY of short poems, i.e. simile & metaphor creative writing.

In addition to the assigned poem, teachers also allowed students to recite and sing love poems/songs as their chosen verses for their midterm and final oral tests. Besides, thirteen of Shakespeare's sonnets were given as an agreed assignment to students for winter break. Students were provided with the Chinese translation and the tape of the reciting of the thirteen sonnets. They were asked to memorize the lines of one of the sonnets and write a journal about it.

Students were encouraged to either record their favorite poems on the tape or collect their favorite poems periodically with illustrations as project work. They were also highly recommended to surf the internet in order to catch up with the world trend of using the web in poetry learning.

In the school year of 1999, most of the syllabus remained the same as that of 1998. However, the following changes were made. First, the famous musical opera CATS was shown as a variety of combination of poems and music. Second, a class performance named "Poetry Variety Show" hosted by students was arranged to take the place of group performance in response to students suggestions. Third, the well-known Italian movie *The Postman* was added to the syllabus to introduce a great modern poet.

The following are the course syllabi in 1997, 1998, and 1999.

First Semester

Week	Year of 1997	Year of 1998	Year of 1999
1	School begins	School begins	School begins
2	What Is Poetry	Mother Goose	Course Introduction Mother Goose
3	What Is Poetry	Mother Goose	Mother Goose
4	Imagery	Supplement 1	Holiday
5	Imagery	Students' Performance	Group Sharing: The Dead Poets Society
6	Imagery	Musical Devices	Musical Devices
7	Reading the Poem	Musical Devices	Sound & Meaning
8	Reading the Poem	Supplement 2 –1 Oral Test	Sound & Meaning Oral Test
9	Oral Test	Midterm Exam	Midterm Exam
10	Midterm Exam	Midterm Discussion Sound & Meaning	Midterm Discussion Sound & Meaning
11	Denotation & Connotation	Sound & Meaning	Holiday
12	Denotation & Connotation	What Is Poetry	What Is Poetry
13	Allusion	What Is Poetry	Group Sharing
14	Allusion	Students' Performance Supplement 2-2/2-3	Reading the Poems
15	Figurative Language	Reading the Poem	Reading the Poems
16	Figurative Language	Reading the Poem	X'mas Carol & Poems Allusion
17	Figurative Language	Supplement 2-4/2-5	Oral Test
18	Oral Test	Oral Test	Final Examination
19	Final Examination	Final Examination	Final Examination

Second Semester

Week	Year of 1997	Year of 1998	Year of 1999
1	School begins	School begins	Syllabus introduction Group Sharing: Winter Morning Video Viewing
2	Symbol	Allusion	Imagery
3	Paradox	Imagery	Connotation &

			Denotation
4	Video: The Dead Poets Society	Connotation & Denotation	Haiku
5	Irony Meaning & Idea	Connotation & Denotation	Poems from Cats
6	Spring Break	Video Viewing: Dead Poets Society	Video Viewing: Cats
7	Meaning :& Idea	Spring Break	Spring Break
8	Oral Test	Oral Test	Oral Test
9	Midterm Exam	Midterm Exam	Midterm Exam
10	Tone	Midterm Discussion Simile & Metaphor	Midterm Discussion Simile & Metaphor
11	Tone	Simile & Metaphor Personification & Apostrophe	Simile & Metaphor Personification & Apostrophe
12	Musical Devices	Group Sharing: Group Creative Writing	Poems from the Postman
13	Musical Devices	Symbol	Video Viewing: The Postman
14	Rhythm & Meter	Symbol	Symbol
15	Rhythm & Meter	Irony	Symbol Poetry Variety Show Rehearsal
16	Sound & Meaning	Irony & Tone	Poetry Variety Show
17	Sound & Meaning	Oral Test	Oral Test
18	Oral Test Course Evaluation	Review Course Evaluation	Review Course Evaluation
19	Final Examination	Final Examination	Final Examination

ACTIVITIES & STAGES

In this section readers response approach was woven into activities in different stages. These activities include "Classroom Activities", "Video Viewing", "Group Sharing Performance", and "Poetry Contest".

1. Classroom activities. Classroom activities that students are quite interested in are a) creative self-introduction, b) Haiku, c) Mother Goose, and d) instant poetry show.

(a) Self-introduction In the first class right after the course introduction, the instructor wrote the following words vertically (see 1 below) and invited students to figure out her first name. The whole class was then encouraged to brainstorm their own words to match their first names and then shared with their partners. Some students would create their own self-introduction page with a short text and pictures or a short poem.

1	2	3
Aggressive	*Wild*	*Sincere*
Neat	*Enjoy*	*Handy*
Thoughtful	*Natural*	*Intelligent*
Organized	*Dickinson*	*Responsible*
Neutral	*Yellow*	*Lazy*
Imaginative		*Elegant*
Adventurous		*Young*

4	5
I'm a girl *who is* *QUIET, OBSERVANT, RESTLESS.* *I'm a girl* *who has* *LOVE, CURIOSITY, INDEPENDENCE.* *I'm a girl* *who loves* *MUSIC, MOVIES, BOOKS.* *I'm a girl* *who loves* *NATURE, VOYAGE, PEACE.* *I'm a girl* *who wants to* *LEARN, THINK, SENSE.* (Renita Chu)	***I'm a girl with a cute smile.*** ***I like English.*** ***I wanna go to the U.S. to study.*** ***I like to eat, sleep, and read.*** ***No pictures, only words.*** ***From deep inside my heart.*** ***Lots of things to say.*** ***Lots of places to go.*** ***I'm a girl with a kind heart.*** ***I like my friends.*** ***I wanna learn English well.*** ***And travel around the world.*** ***I'm a girl, just a girl.*** ***I'm a girl named Vicky Chen.*** ***(Vicky Chen)***

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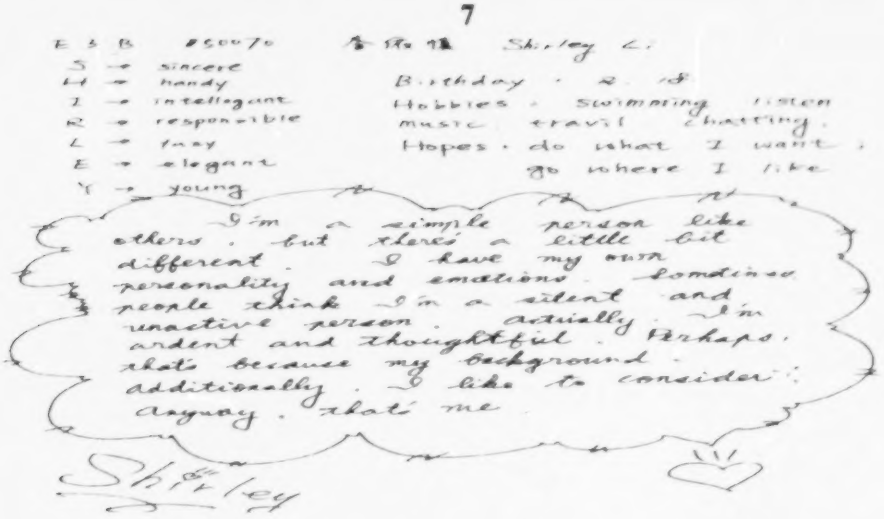
S → sincere
H → handy
I → intelligent
R → responsible
L → lucy
E → elegant
Y → young
Shirley L.
Birthday · 2 · 18
Hobbies · swimming listen
music travel chatting
Hopes · do what I want
go where I like
I'm a simple person like others, but there's a little bit different. I have my own personality and emotions. Sometimes people think I'm a silent and inactive person, actually, I'm ardent and thoughtful. Perhaps, that's because my background. Additionally, I like to consider; anyway, that's me
Shirley

(b) Haiku In order the create a less threatening atmosphere for the lesson of haiku, the whole class was taken to the outdoor area, the square in front of the dormitory, and was divided into groups of 5 to 6. Samples of haiku taken from the internet were passed out. Students were guided to count the syllables and read the poems to feel the rhythm. Then they had half an hour to create their own haiku. They were allowed to stay outdoors or go to the gym of the dormitory where they could lie down. When time was up, each group presented their haiku, reading aloud with action or any non-linguistic techniques they could think of. The work was then collected, reviewed and then posted onto the teacher-made web site so that they would see their achievements and realize the value of hard work.

(c) Mother Goose In order to close the section of Mother Goose, a game was conducted in the classroom. Index cards were prepared with questions, and students were divided into groups of four. Questions were written based on the poems from the collection of Mother Goose. For instance, "Name five animals that appear in Mother Goose" "Give four occupations mentioned in Mother Goose" and "Say the tongue twister in 30 seconds: Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled pepper." Other questions related to color, food, riddles, and number were tested. Points were given to those who got the right answers. In the end, the group that earned the most points would get A+. Different scores were given to the groups based on the points they earned.

(d) Instant Poetry Show The students were usually seated in groups. They were given a task to show their experience of reading a chosen poem or the poem(s) we had just done by performing it right after the discussion or activities of a couple of poems.

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They usually had fifteen minutes or so to prepare for this instant task. It was quite challenging for them because they had to respond to the poem within a time limit. The good performances would then be shown again in the get-together class.

2. Video Viewing. In this course videos were played for the joint classes, such as *The Dead Poets Society* and Pablo Neruda's *The Postman*. Extra videos might be played to match with the topic mentioned in the lesson.

(a) *The Dead Poets Society.* *The Dead Poets Society* published by Touchstone in 1989 is definitely an ideal motion picture for poetry teaching/learning. The purpose of choosing it is to enable learners to get the insights of how teenagers learn poetry and how they are devoted to poetry. In 1998 a teacher-made worksheet about the film was given before viewing so that the comprehension questions could be digested by the learners first and then they could find the answers from viewing. In 1999 a couple of question strips were distributed to learners for jigsaw viewing. The purposes of worksheet and question strips were to stress on comprehension, cooperative work as well as personal feedback.

(b) *The Postman.* Although Italian is the spoken language in the movie, the Chinese caption was given so that students would not have problem in understanding. The purposes of showing this film were to help students see how poetic terms like simile and metaphor were used and at the same time to experience the passion of poetry lovers. Poems selected from the sound track compact disk were printed to students before viewing and the CD was played. As for the reflection, students were invited to answer the teacher's question in an A4 paper folded into four parts anonymously: What is the most impressive part in the film? They were allowed to give short texts or use pictures to express themselves. When completed, these papers were passed around so that the students had a chance to read what others had put. Then the papers were collected. On the whole, they had the similar feedback. They were touched deeply by the way the postman recorded his poems in the mountains, in the sea, and by the baby's bed. They were moved by the solid and unusual friendship between the poet and the postman. They sighed for the appearance of the postman's son whom Neruda saw when he came back to visit the postman. They were influenced by the enthusiastic learner who was just a beginning learner in poetry. Besides that, the teacher's reflection was also shared with the whole class. The following was written and read by the teacher:

> *Mario might have been influenced by his family that Pablo Neruda had forgotten them since he had never mentioned them in the interviews.*

However, he kept his passion and love of poetry in searching for the channels to lighten his works. The way he committed in recording the sound of nature and his baby touched me deeply in that one should be devoted to what he believes no matter what people say about him. Why should we care whether people will keep you in mind or not? The importance is that one should believe in himself. Anyone can become a poet as long as he enjoys it, tries it, and writes it. Keeping a poem in your pocket should be keeping a poem in your heart, I would say.

(c) Winter Morning. Ogdon Nash's *Winter Morning* video (PBS Reading Rainbow) was viewed by chance by the writer. It was then put in the 1999 Winter final exam to elicit learners' favorite line and to respond to the poem in addition to giving an appropriate title. It was successful because they were able to hit the target and were open enough to deliver their feelings in writing. When the new semester began, the three classes got together in Kung Chien Hall where the poem was passed out and learners illustrated individually after reading the poem. Next, they shared their pictures in groups of four. Then the video clip was played twice; thus students may compare their work with that in the film. Again, they were invited to share personal feedback to the poem. This helped learners sustain the verse, the imagery, and the sound as well.

3. Group Sharing. Besides classroom activities students have at least two times a semester to gather as a three-class party and perform their reading aloud. This could be a group demonstration, individual reading, and group creation in trying to make a simile or metaphor with a handout of samples. These group sharing times attract students a lot in that they had a chance to show what they have learned and display their creation. Meanwhile, they had an opportunity to observe what others did. Some of the samples have been linked to the teacher-made web site and would be shown in the workshop through internet. What's more, the group sharing could also be a sharing of the previous work done by the elder students and was kept in the form of slides. Students were asked to use pictures to match a poem they like every other week and they kept their work in a folder so that an assessment would be made in the end of the semester. This project encouraged their imagination and invited investigation of their favorite poem and made the appropriate illustration.

The last group sharing in the second semester of 1999 school year was adjusted in reply to students' feedback. They preferred that everyone should have the chance to be on the stage instead of volunteers or the chosen students. In this case, the teachers decided to give the title "Poetry Variety Show" to the joint class sharing. This was

expected that they would be able to work as a whole unit, no longer group work done without connection. In other words, everything each class did should be linked to the same theme/topic in the performance. Among the three classes, two of them maintained the ordinary group sharing with everyone in the class joining the performance whereas one class used a topic they agreed: "grandparents' wedding anniversary" to show their work. Nevertheless the students did not come from the same class and they had difficulty in seeing one another in an appointed time. Even though the schedule had been announced in the beginning of the semester, the meeting log and meeting time were given to the students, and the rehearsal was scheduled in the syllabus, the results of this class' topic performance were not so successful as expected. Yet from their feedback they liked the idea of using a theme to show a family event through poems. The poems included memory, love, respect, childhood, comfort and worry. They felt that they would have done it better if given one more chance. This class also learned a lesson that they would have to work together for an agreed goal no matter how difficult it was to overcome any obstacles and that they would have to pay time and energy to accomplish the project.

4. Poetry Contest. In 1998 some senior students who took the course in 1997 participated the English Poetry Recitation Contest held at Sun Yet Sen University and were awarded with group prize and individual prize. Because of their distinguished accomplishments, the English Association, one of the students unions at Wen Tzao Ursuline College, decided to hold an English poetry contest on campus. This proposal was approved and became one of the fixed annual contests besides English Radio Work and English Drama contests. It was such a great mixture of the course and extracurricular activity. All students at WTUC are encouraged to take part in the poetry recitation contest in terms of the 1st – 2nd year and 3rd – 5th year groups. The poems were chosen by the supervisor of the English Association. This program has been quite successful in that drama, music, and prop have been integrated into the performance. Video samples of such a contest will be shown in the workshop.

MULTIMEDIA APPLICATION

Because of the great development of internet, some of the wonderful data has been collected to enrich teaching. Extra information like poets autobiographies and reading from Gale's CD-Rom named Exploring Poetry, personal data of Ralph Fiennes who read Ode to the Sea in the Postman CD, Haiku resource from the internet, and available links to poetry teaching/learning have broadened the scope of the syllabus of poetry. A teacher-made web site was created in early 2000 in which the

chapters to be covered in the semester were posted, students works were edited, links were introduced, and the handouts that were made in the previous years were also posted. An interactive test section was not built up until the well-designed software HOT POTATOES was discovered.

Hot Potatoes software was applied to the course as an interactive and supplementary source. With different styles of tests students are able to take a test in forms of multiple choice, cloze, Q/A, match, and so on to check their comprehension at any time. This part will be demonstrated in the workshop.

TENTATIVE TASKS

After a couple of years' experience in poetry teaching, tentative tasks may be considered in the near future to develop more interactive learning in terms of reader's response:

1. Build up a discussion area in which learners can practice writing their poems or express their perception about a poem given periodically on the bulletin board and share responses with others.
2. Set up a questionnaire with which a favorite poem or poem of the month can be voted to find out what these young adults like. At the same time, surveys of learners' attitudes about and expectations on the course in the beginning and in the end of the semester can be made and compared. With such valuable data teachers who are involved in this course may get the feedback and give necessary explanation in the shortest time.
3. Create a visitor's record so as to figure out the frequency of visit under the computer center's technique assistance. Thus, further research about the visit and the learning results can be done.
4. Make a homework area in which everyone should submit their assignment whether in text or in sound; thus, the paperless homework saves paper and students will take the responsibility of handing in their homework on time.
5. On-line elective course and in-class elective course can be considered to exist simultaneously and evaluation can be done to see if it is possible to carry out an on-line poetry class.
6. Transform the previous tapes recorded by the students into voice files and allow new learners to listen to, and good reading samples can be accumulated.
7. Promote portfolio to learners either in folder or on internet; therefore, they will have the process of poetry learning and their responses to their favorite poems which will create a unique personal record in poetry learning.

CONCLUSION

This presentation introduced how the course design had been adjusted based on readers response. It also revealed interactive activities and software application used in the poetry course. Since poetry needs to be experienced instead of explained (Benton & Fox, 1985), all that has been done is to help learners become a reader of passion, observant mind, emotion, motivation, and imagination. To make it better, we'd like to make the learners become independent life-long readers. In this course learners not only appreciate poetry but also experience poetry performance. The learners are no longer novices at poetry. They are aware of poetic language and they are able to reach out authentic materials. Most importantly, they value their reflection and respect other people's work through communication whether in discussion, in sharing performance, or on internet. Furthermore, it is expected that the development of poetry web site which was set up for the learners' sake may involve not only the teachers, the friends out there in the web, but also learners to respond their reading.

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